

**Caretakers of the Garden:  
Renewable Energy and Sustainable Living  
In a Christian Secondary High School**

*God looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good. Gen:1:31*

*We praise You Lord, for all Your creatures,  
Especially for Brother Sun,  
Who is the day through whom You give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor,  
Of You Most High, he bears your likeness.*

*We praise You Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars,  
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.*

*We praise You Lord, for Brothers Wind and Air,  
Fair and stormy, all weather's moods,  
By which You cherish all that You have made.*

*We praise You Lord, for Sister Water,  
So useful, humble, precious and pure.*

*We Praise You Lord, for Brother Fire,  
Through whom You light the night.  
He is beautiful, playful, robust and strong.*

*We praise You Lord, for Sister Earth,  
Who sustains us  
With her fruits, colored flowers and herbs.*

*Saint Francis of Assisi*

The genesis of this project has its roots in Genesis. Creation is a manifestation of our God's abundant love and abundant life. Our response to our Creator God is to be grateful caretakers of this sacred garden, nurturing the growth of the Body of Christ and bringing forth the Kingdom of Heaven.

Everything in the universe is balanced in the Sacred Heart of God who is Jesus Christ our Lord. The mission of our school is to be a reflection of that reality, not only in the environment of our hearts, but in the environment of our high school community, and earthly home, as well. This life-giving mission needs to be integrated into the spiritual, physical, and educational life of the school. Ours is not a school of green technology, but a Catholic Christian school reflecting the life giving grace of our God, symbolized in the lush and abundant green of creation. We honor God by prayerfully creating a life-giving space for physical health, spiritual growth and educational excellence.

Native American spirituality has always revered the earth and has much to teach us about a way of respect and gratitude toward our planetary home:

*"I taught them to perceive the world as One Whole Organism. I taught people to respect every life. I taught them to live and act on the Earth impeccably, disturbing not the harmony, balance, and beauty of the environment. Since childhood, an Indian learned to listen and understand the world around-the sun, the stars, the wind, the forest, rivers, lakes, animals...they learned to follow the laws of nature in their life; they understood that by violating these laws, one causes unnecessary pain to the living."*

*White Eagle*

**The focus of our project was to prayerfully explore ways of teaching a heart reverence for ourselves, others, and the earth and have that reflected in the curriculum and environment of the school and the hearts, minds, and souls of our students. We set out to become a national model for all Christ-centered secondary schools.**

A committee was convened to explore the potential connection between sustainable energy research and our top flight engineering curriculum, set in the context of a prayerful reverence for God's Good Earth. The committee began with a grand vision which included building a towering wind turbine, a large geothermal field and an extensive solar panel array which would provide for much of the energy needs of the school. We hoped to be a dramatic sign to the community demonstrating our commitment to becoming a school of sustainable energy research and green initiative implementation.

We gathered information regarding capital expenditures as well as matching funds available from Focus on Energy and WeEnergies of Wisconsin. The cost to the school was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Many potential sources of revenue were pursued as we went forward with feasibility studies. It became readily apparent that the funding needed for such a project was not currently available and the payback on such an investment was too long-term. The initial grand vision was not going to become a reality at this time and alternatives needed to be explored that required less funding.

The committee received input from four companies that are leaders in the areas of sustainable energy research, implementation and education: Johnson Controls, Chevron, American Renewable Power, and Environmental Systems. Some things that were taken away from our meetings with these companies are as follows: 1. Johnson Controls provided us with Energy Educational materials designed for K-12 education. 2. Chevron provided us with some possible funding information. 3. American Renewable Power gave us a comprehensive overview of renewable energy solutions to shape the future. 4. Environmental Systems created a short term interactive solution path for sustainability specifically designed for the school.

This was the path we were going to follow had I continued as President at Saint Thomas More High School instead of leaving the school to become President at Notre Dame Academy in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

One of the most valuable pieces of information that we obtained and I will be taking with me to Notre Dame Academy came from the National Catholic Rural Life Conference entitled, **Climate Change and Catholic Schools**. Let me briefly summarize the salient points which you may find useful when planning renovations or new constructions at your school or things to continue on an ongoing basis:

### **When planning renovations or new construction at your school...**

1. Consider water use efficiency, landscaping, storm water design, innovative wastewater technology and water use reduction. 2. Consider energy use efficiency, technology to optimize energy performance, on-site renewable energy and reducing energy use. 3. Consider the content of material such as recycled, reused, regionally sourced, renewable, certified wood. 4. Consider indoor environmental quality such as acoustical performance, increased ventilation, low-emitting materials, daylight and views, thermal comfort and mold prevention.

### **On an ongoing basis at your school...**

1. Utilize the operation and structure of the school buildings and campus for experiential learning and discovery. 2. Have special groups regarding care of creation and sustainability that regularly advises the administration on environmental, human health, and stewardship related issues affecting the school. 3. Help students and parents make the connection between the operation of the school, climate change, and Catholic social teaching. 4. Reduce waste by using recycled products, products that do not have packaging or that use recyclable packages or that can be recycled including electronics.

### **Some Climate Web Resources for Facilities Management:**

- **U.S. Green Building Council** ([www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org))--nonprofit -- community of leaders working to make green buildings available to everyone within a generation.
- **Green Buildings and Energy Efficiency**  
[http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?=&green\\_buildings.green\\_buildings\\_index](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?=&green_buildings.green_buildings_index)  
Online informational resources from the Environmental Protection Agency about developing an energy management strategy.
- **Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education** (<http://www.aashe.org>) –an association of colleges and universities promoting sustainability in all sectors of higher education- from governance and operations to curriculum and outreach.
- **Sustainable Facility** (<http://www.sustainablefacility.com>) –an environmental source for power management.

- **National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology Blog** (<http://blogs.nwf.org/campus>) –communications about what is going on about climate change in all sectors of college campuses.

### **Some Resources for Global Climate Change, Care of Creation and Catholic Thought:**

- **National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Climate Change-A Moral Problem** ([http://www.ncrlc.com/global\\_climate\\_change.html](http://www.ncrlc.com/global_climate_change.html)) –An analysis of global climate change through the lens of Catholic social teaching.
- **Catholic Coalition on Climate Change** (<http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/>) –supports and complements US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Office of Justice, Peace and Human Development.
- **The Ecological Crisis: A Moral Responsibility** ([http://www.ncrlc.com/ecological\\_crisis.html](http://www.ncrlc.com/ecological_crisis.html))
- **Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response-A Pastoral Letter on Stewardship** (<http://www.usccb.org/stewardship/>)
- **Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching** (<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml>)

Our Loving, Creator God, made all things for His people, who themselves, are created in His likeness and image. He created a garden like home to be reverently cared for and gratefully appreciated. That is the story of our genesis, and the genesis of this project. It is ongoing and universal. May our prayers and the guidance of the Holy Spirit lead us to right living and right practice for the glory and honor of our God.